Chapter 7

Words and Rules

Mu xlam sk'oplal, mu xa xic' k'op rason (The stream of words about him will not be eased; he will no longer listen to words, listen to reason.)

I have suggested that gossip is implicitly about rules, or the interpretation of behavior through rules. Rules are slippery things --- in anthropological, philosophical, and legal discourse, as well as in real life. Much of the history of anthropology revolves around the debate over the nature of kin rules (particularly marriage rules), over criteria for saying that a rule 'governs' behavior, or that behavior 'conforms to' or 'invokes' a rule. In our anthropological lives we confront a multiplicity of rules: statistical rules, normative rules, jural rules, rules of thumb, practical rules, rules of etiquette (which, in the field, we must live by as well as describe), and so on. Gossips formulate quite particular, straightforward rules --- typically, propositions which relate to the set of events in question. Later in this chapter I discuss further the notion that gossip deals with rules; I also investigate the relation between gossip and the process of 'learning the rules' of a culture.

First I propose to examine some words from gossip. At the level of analysis of Figure 9A in Chapter 6, gossip consists of words and phrases: it is text. Gossips depend on their skill with words to draw morals from (apply rules to) the events they describe and to elicit the desired response from their

audiences. Words with evaluative power occur frequently in gossip. If there were moral philosophers in Zinacantan (and there may be), they might look at gossip to understand the primary verbal tools of moral argument. In looking at the segment of Tzotzil vocabulary that occurs in Zinacanteco gossip I ask first what words facilitate evaluation and turn mere narrative into gossip; and second, what an adequate account of the semantics of such powerful words might include.

Are the facts of usage in gossip reliable indicators of correct usage? When people argue on moral questions does their argument hinge on word-meanings, on the facts of a situation, on a rule, on the application of a rule? Often all these are at stake. In a vacuum it may be possible to assign a word its referent or to state a rule baldly (out of context); but gossip bends the already tenuous relationship between words (and the verbal propositions which embody rules) and reality --- that is, the facts. The gossip uses words and states rules for particular purposes. Thus in gossip one has an unimpeachable source for data about how these verbal tools _can_ be used.

Words

Lacking a satisfactory semantic theory (well-motivated either by linguistic or ethnographic concerns), it is hard to know what facts are relevant to a description of the meanings of words which occur in gossip. Many crucial active words in gossip will typically be polysemic; but their use involves a complexity and evident indeterminacy that goes beyond multiple meanings. Words describing personality traits, dispositions, and so forth, refer only to elusive entities if they refer at all. Words with evaluative implications draw communicative power from their positions in sense systems (Lyons (1969), Haviland (1970b)) --- that is, in relation to other words --- as well, for example, as from metaphor. A narrator may base his claim that 'Xun has a bad head' (i.e., an evil temper) on certain objective characteristics Xun possesses; but we understand what he means insofar as we appreciate the existence of other words the narrator could have chosen to describe Xun's temperament differently. We stand most in need of a semantic theory when we try to describe the behavior of such words and expressions.

From transcribed gossip conversations I selected what seemed interesting occurrences of words and phrases. (What makes usage interesting? Are exotic usages metaphorical, or are they literal uses of exotic words? How can one state precisely the source of the fascination that grows out of learning a new language: what an odd way to talk!) By a mechanical procedure I kept track of certain stems, which occur typically in explicit

or implied evaluations, as they appeared throughout the corpus.

The gossip context provides natural examples of usage. I was

thus relieved of the necessity to work from translations or de-
2
finitions.   I extract semantic facts from such natural examples

--- material essentially like that available to native language

learners.

1

 Francesca Cancian (n.d.) isolated normatively salient Tzotzil
words by asking informants to insert words from a Tzotzil-English
dictionary in frames like:
        Xun is a good man because _____.
        Maryan is respected because _____.
The clustering of traits represented by commonly occurring des-
criptive phrases in the frames forms the basis for her analysis
of 'norms'.
        What I have done is in some ways parallel, and it involves
similar assumptions. Starting from an evaluative context (for
Prof. Cancian, normatively loaded eliciting frames; in my case,
gossip comments with evaluative overtones), we extract sets of
words which strike us as active in the evaluative system. Both
procedures operate with a preconception of what constitutes
evaluation, or what 'values' are like. I have the advantage of
being able to work with naturally occurring material rather than
artificially elicited phrases.

2

 Christopher Boehm has suggested to me in conversation that all
people have natural schemata for definition; that is, that in
all languages people regularly define words --- if only to in-
struct others in the language. Whether or not this is true, it
seems unlikely that --- except for philosophers --- people ever
offer definitions for common words (as, for example, those used
in ordinary evaluation). Or, more exactly, one has occasion to
define a word ('give a definition') only in quite particular
circumstances; it is not, perhaps, the most common (or even
most efficient) way to teach someone how to use a word. All
of these techniques must be distinguished from offerring a
gloss (a translation?) for a word.

I was most interested in words of the following sorts:

(a) Words frequently used to mark approval, disapproval, agreement, disagreement, pleasure, displeasure, etc. For example, a common expression meaning "that won't do" is /mu stak'/ ('it isn't possible; literally, it doesn't answer'). Such words are part of a meta-language for evaluation.

(b) Keywords in the implied rules underlying questions of fact in gossip discussions. I showed in Chapter 4 how the dialogue between narrator and interlocutor often concerns key aspects of the protagonists' behavior: in a courtship, did the parents of the bride /tak'av/ ('answer favorably')? Did one man /p'is ta vinik/ ('respect') another properly? Gossip focusses on the key clauses of underlying rules (propositions expressing rules) through the medium of words.

(c) Words about what I have called unobservables: personal propensities and traits of character, motives, emotions, desires, etc. Buried in this segment of vocabulary is a native theory of personality, a native psychology which figures freely in gossip sessions.

(d) Words which evoke hypothetical outcomes, alternative courses of action, contrary-to-fact possibilities. Much of the evaluative portion of a gossip session may be devoted to speculation about how things should have been done, how they could have turned out otherwise.

Underlying these verbal investigations is the Wittgensteinian premise that words and the phenomena with which they

are associated are inseparable. We learn about the world (or about a particular world) as we learn a language. I may again invoke Austin:

> "When we examine what we should say when, what words we should use in what situation, we are looking again not merely at words (or 'meanings', whatever they may be) but also at the realities we use the words to talk about: we are using a sharpened awareness of words to sharpen our perception of, though not as the final arbiter of, the phenomena." (1961:130)

As ethnographers we must be interested in seeing how the elements of the cultural universe, the conventions and rules of a culture, are mirrored in its vocabulary; and how words themselves are objects for speculation and manipulation. We find ourselves somewhere in the Whorfian tradition. That the resources of a language may lead us to speak of moral dilemmas in a certain way must certainly affect the nature of the dilemmas themselves. What we cannot talk about is irrelevant, or at least unavailable for scrutiny. For the outsider, it is talk that leads directly to what is relevant.

Tzotzil roots have been arranged into form classes according to the groups of affixes with which they combine.[3] I divided words selected from gossip into categories according to the

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[3] Robert M. Laughlin has remarked in conversation that some Tzotzil roots seem to fall into several different categories, whereas some are defective in the sense that they do not display all expected forms. The classification system I use in this chapter is similar to but not identical with that of Laughlin (n.d.). See Haviland (n.d.) for further details.

grammatical properties of the roots involved. Thus, for example, the underlined words in the following sentences are all associated with the single underlying noun root /k'op/ ('word, etc.'):

(1) /ip'ahik 7o ta nop-k'op/ (P 143)
Thus they became involved in telling lies.

(2) /kecel 7o sk'oplal/ (P 84)
The affair in which he is involved is still unresolved.

(3) /baz'i toh xilim ck'opoh/ (P 167)
The way he talks is completely wild.

(4) /sa7oh yahk'opohel pero ishoyp'in sba/ (P 185)
He found a lawyer, but he changed sides.

(5) /Li mole mu sk'an k'oponel/ (P 413)
The old man doesn't want to be talked to.

(6) /yu7van xaval ti 7o hset' xcikin xak'opon/ (P 439)
Don't try to tell me that he will listen to you
at all if you try to talk to him.

(7) /lek 7amiko hk'opon hba hci7uk/
I talk to him (treat him) as a friend.

There are also Adjective, Intransitive and Transitive Verb, Positional roots, and others.

Within each root class I have distinguished subclasses on distributional grounds (e.g., a class of Adjectives which refer to human qualities, or which modify verbs) and by more intuitive criteria. (For example, within the class of Adjectives referring to human qualities one can distinguish those roots which involve physical characteristics from those dealing with personal qualities, propensities and (non-physical) states.)

Within each subclass I offer, in the description below, groupings which result from a special sort of native sorting task. I gave an informant decks of cards on which words from

a subclass of roots were written. He arranged them in piles,
not on the basis of 'semantic similarity' (see Berlin (1968:28))
whatever that is, but by virtue of their 'going together well'[4]
in the sense that they could occur together in a coherent story.
These groupings of words represent not some ultimately small
semantic domains; rather they exemplify the ordinary use to
which words are put in practical situations (like gossiping):
words evoke culturally salient images --- types of people, fre-
quent social situations, etc. We learn the code (the language)
not only by understanding its units (the meanings of words)
but by being familiar with frequent messages (typical ways
in which the language is employed.)

Adjective roots

Tzotzil contains a large number of adjective roots which
are used frequently to refer to human beings. Of these, the
most interesting with respect to the evaluative power of gossip
are adjectives with a normative component, those which imply
some trait of character, usually negatively evaluated.[5]

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[4]
See the sorting task in Chapter 3 producing a taxonomy of
/k'op/. My informant, /Cep K'obyox/ of /7Apas/, explained that
words in a single pile /snup sbaik, xci7in sbaik/ ('meet each
other, accompany each other'). (See Chapter 3, footnote 6.)
As will become clear below, my informant solidified the rela-
tionships between words sorted together by means of often
elaborate stories or examples of usage.

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[5]
Note that not all adjectives in the language derive from ad-
jectival roots; for example, the surface structure adjective
/vaxal/ comes from a Positional root which seems to mean 'calm',
(see next page for continuation of footnote)

Here are some examples, listed alphabetically, of roots of this

class which figure prominently in Zinacanteco gossip. For each

entry I give a gloss (those glosses preceded by a dollar-sign

($) are from Laughlin (n.d.)), examples from the gossip, and

occasionally distributional or derivational information.

/7abol -ba/: $'be suffering'; 'be abject, poor'

> (8) /baz'i 7abol abaik, yiluk yil, lah xa ko7on/ (P 278)
> You are suffering so; never mind, I am no longer
> angry. (A parent addressing his previously
> estranged daughter.)

/bol/: 'stupid'
Has noun form: /-bolil/ ('stupidity'); and intransitive
verb /-bolib/ ('become stupid')

> (9) /mi ta hna7 k'u x7elan sbolil/ (E74)
> Am I supposed to know about his stupidity?

> (10) /ya7yoh sbolil/ (E 373)
> People have heard about his foolishness.

> (11) /mi7n cavak'be ta 7ora ta hz'ikbe sbolil/ (P 277)
> If you will give her immediately then I will put up
> with her transgressions. (A suitor trying to bargain
> for a wife whose reputation has been compromised.)

> (12) /ibolibtasat/ (P 314)
> He was made foolish. (A man given a potion who
> became feeble-minded.)

/cic/: $'extremely loquacious, saying everything that occurs
to one'; 'foolish, befuddled'

> (13) /ibolib icicub xa/ (P 257)
> He has now become stupid, become foolish.

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5 (continued)
'quiet' or 'tame'. When applied to humans it ordinarily
means 'good-natured' or simply 'good' (not unruly, trouble-
some, wicked). I occasionally included such words in the
sets of cards for sorting tasks to see how they were arranged
among other true adjectives referring to what seemed in-
tuitively similar properties.

/copol/: 'bad'

(14) /leklek 7anzon xitun, mu7nuk coplikon, hna7
xi7abteh/ (P 314)
I am a good woman; I'm not bad; I know how to work.

(15) /toh copol shol tahmek cyakub/ (H 65)
He gets a very bad head when he is drunk (i.e.,
he's an ugly drunk.)

/cuvah/: 'crazy, mad'; $'silly'

(16) /ivovi 7o, 7ipas 7o ta cuvah/ (P 299)
He went crazy because of it; he became a madman.

(17) /7ec' ta cuvahil/ (E 311)
He passed through a period of madness.

/c'ah/: 'lazy'

(18) /xulem xutik yu7un toh c'ah/ (H 21)
They call him 'Buzzard' because he's so lazy.

/c'inin/: $'itchy'; 'promiscuous, licentious'

/lek/: 'good'

(19) /ma7uk lekil vinik ta melel/ (P 353)
You're right, he's not a good man.

(20) /mu hna7 mi lekil krixcano le7e, mu hna7 mi
cvovi nan / (P 350)
I don't know if that one is a sane person or if
he is perhaps going mad.

(21) /lek yo7on/ (E 435)
He has a good heart (i.e., is good-natured.)

(22) /mi k'un to lapukuhib ti lekot to7oxe/ (H 40)
Did you only gradually become evil; for you used
to be allright.

/loko/: $'provocative, oversexed, boy-crazy'

(23) /yu7nox 7unen lokotik tahmek c'iem tah zeb/ (P 283)
That girl just grew up to be sort of wild.

/manya/: 'mischievous, wicked, underhanded'

(24) /kavron, toh manya molot/ (P 283)
Cabron! You are such a dirty old man!

(25) /7an c'anuk, mu hna7 k'usitik <u>manyaon</u> ana7oh,
vo7one molon/ (P 307)
Shut up! I don't know what <u>wickedness</u> you are
attributing to me; I am an elder. (Man rebuking
those who made lewd insinuations.)

/me7on/: 'poor'
This is probably a noun root meaning $'orphan'.

(26) /<u>me7on</u>, naka con-si7 zpas/ (H 57)
He is <u>poor</u>; he lives by selling firewood.

/mol/: 'old, elder'; $'large'

(27) /k'usi amulil, pero <u>molot</u> xa, mi xana7 xasa7
k'op to/ (P 292)
What crime have you committed? But you are an
<u>old</u> man; do you still get into trouble?

/mu/: $'delicious, fragrant, disgusting'

(28) /yan x7elan li <u>mu</u> hvabahome/ (E 340)
That <u>awful</u> musician is disgusting!

(29) /li <u>mu</u> pah-ni7 vinik 7une, liszakik noxtok/ (H 33)
That <u>disgusting</u> droop-nosed man also raped me.

/penteho/: $'stupid or awful'

(30) /mu xa <u>pentehoikon</u> xkik' akecel/ (G 3)
I'm no longer so <u>stupid</u> as to take your leftovers
(i.e., a cast-off lover).

(31) /kavron, pero ma7uk vinik li <u>penteho</u>/ (P 348)
Cabron! That <u>stupid</u> <u>fellow</u> isn't a man.

/pim/: 'stubborn'

/porkirya/: $'disgusting'
Use of this word is usually restricted to women.

(32) /mu xa muc'u xci7inon, <u>porkirya</u> mol sbon sba
ta pukuh/ (P 181)
There is no longer anyone who will accompany the
<u>disgusting</u> old man, since he has soiled himself
through contact with that demon. (Wife complain-
ing of a man who contracted a venereal disease.)

/povre/: 'poor, unfortunate'

(33)/svov xa la iyuc' i <u>povre</u>/ (P 316)
The <u>poor</u> fellow drank it right down, they say.

(34) /ikom 7o ta prove/ (P 190)
He became poverty-stricken.

(35) /povre me7el hun yo7on batem, pero yocél ta
skobbel smuk/ (O 6)
The poor old lady had gone off happily, while they
had already begun to fuck her younger sister.

/pukuh/: $'dangerous, devilish, evil'; 'ill-tempered'

(36) /xa7i sba baz'i pukuh/ (P 446)
He thinks himself to be quite tough.

(37) /pukuh ilok', mu sk'an mantal, mu sk'an xci7in
stot/ (H 49)
He has turned out to be unpleasant: he won't
obey; he won't live with his father.

(38) /ta sk'opohel no7ox xvinah ti toh pukuh/ (H 65)
It is evident from his speech alone that he is
terribly ill-tempered.

(39) /toh pukuh tahmek k'al xyakube 7i skotol sa7
smul/ (O 11)
He is awfully ugly when he's drunk, and he gets
into all kinds of trouble.

/p'ih/: $'clever, smart, intelligent'; 'deceitful'
The verb /-p'ihubtas/ means 'to instruct', especially
to instruct in deceitfulness.

(40) /sonso pukuh, p'ih yilel pero baz'i sonso/ (P 393)
He is a foolish ill-tempered person; he seems to
be smart but he is really stupid.

(41) /tah x7elan sp'ihubtas ti 7o spoxil/ (P 165)
That is how he informed (the other) about the
existence of the potion (an aphrodesiac).

(42) /ha7 nan xp'ihubtasvan li vinik 7une/ (H 45)
It was probably the man who told (her) how
to act (to deceive a supernatural being.)

/sonso/: 'stupid, ordinary, ingenuous'
See example (40) above.

(43) /7unen sonsotik nan ck vo7one/ (P 118)
He's just an ordinary stupid person like me.

(44) /mu k'u bal 7o, baz'i sonso, mu xul zhol k'u
zpas/ (P 314)
He is good for nothing, just stupid; he can't
think what to do.

(45) /yu7nox <u>sonso</u>, mu sna7 kastiya/ (E 87)
He's just <u>stupid</u>; he doesn't know Spanish.

(46) /mu sna7 mi co7el komo <u>sonso</u> xc'ulel/ (O 19)
He didn't know whether or not he was being tricked,
because he has a <u>simple</u> soul (i.e., has no curing
powers.)

/sovra/: $'leftover, worthless'

(47) /muk' bu tun ta hmoh, komuk ta <u>sovra</u>/ (P 440)
He hasn't served at all (i.e., in cargo positions),
he is just a <u>worthless</u> man.

/tuk'/: $'honest, upright, conscientious'
The intransitive verb /-tuk'ib/ means 'become /tuk'/,
straighten out'. The transitive verb /-tuk'ulan/
means $'notice, pay attention to, take care of'.

(48) /<u>tuk'</u>il h7ilol/ (E 104)
He is a <u>straight</u> curer (i.e., not a witch).

(49) /<u>tuk'</u> inupun/ (E 214)
He got married <u>in the correct way</u>.

(50) /<u>tuk'</u>an no7ox me, k'an me ctal li maryane/ (H 79)
<u>Straighten</u> out! Marian might come! (Woman
trying to discourage the advances of her lover
in the face of her husband's imminent arrival.)

(51) /baz'i mu x<u>tuk'</u>ulanat yu7un stot sme7/ (H 84)
He just wasn't <u>taken care of</u> by his parents.

(52) /is<u>tuk'</u>ulan nan ta baz'i yec mu yecuk/ (P 360)
Perhaps he <u>took care of</u> it, but carelessly.

/tuz/: 'homosexual'
Laughlin (n.d.) lists the root from which this word
derives as a Positional root meaning $'stubby, stunted'.

(53) /ta la ssok 7o li 7anze, mu xa la x7alah, timi
xci7in li <u>tuze</u>/ (P 437)
A woman will be ruined, they say --- she will no
longer bear children --- if she sleeps with a
<u>homosexual</u>.

(54) /<u>tuz</u> calbeik 7o li c'abal xc'amal/ (H11)
They call him "<u>homosexual</u>" because he has no children.

/xilim/: $'imprudently'; 'blabber-mouth, wild-talker'

(55) /baz'i toh xilim ck'opoh/ (P 167)
He just talks tactlessly.

(56) /xilimtik xa7i sba/ (E 124)
He acts imprudently, has a Devil-may-care attitude.

/vaxal/: $'quiet, calm, gentle, tame'; 'faultless, upright, good'
This root is apparently a Positional root having to do
with quietness; when applied to people it indicates lack
of evil tendencies.

(57) /mu no7ox yu7un sna7 ti vaxal hset'/ (P 154)
He doesn't know how to behave properly at all.

(58) /vaxlan kavron/ (P 321)
Behave yourself, you bastard!

/vov/: 'mad'
This root has only some adjectival properties.

(59) /solel voviem yilel ta hmoh/ (P 353)
He seems to have gone completely mad.

(60) /avovil xa/ (G 3)
What you are doing is madness!

Cf. example (20)

/yan/: 'different, unpleasant, disgusting'

(61) /yan zpas, kapem/ (P 393)
He acts unpleasantly; he is angry.

(62) /yan sba avo7on/ (G 3)
Your heart is unhappy.

(63) /yan x7elan xcak svex/ (H 19)
The seat of his pants is disgusting.

(64) /yan zpas ti hhole/ (H 66)
My head is mad (i.e., I have wild thoughts, mad
inclinations.)

/yih/: $'thick, ripe, old'; 'disgusting'
Within a single noun phrase the adjective /yihil/ often
means 'disgusting' rather than 'old, etc.'

(65) /mas yihot/ (E 329)
You are older.

(66) /k'u 7onox shol li yihil c'ah krem ya7el/ (P 369)
What's the matter with that disgusting lazy boy
anyway?

(67) /7animal yih s(yih)il-7at/ (P 139)
His <u>disgusting</u> penis was terribly thick!

/yo/: $'miserable, wretched, humble, lowly'; 'less serious'

(68) /pukuh 7onox pero mas <u>yo</u> hset'/ (H 65)
He is evil-tempered all the same, but somewhat <u>less
so</u>.

(69) /mas <u>yo</u> hz'uh, ha7 mas xa7i k'op/ (P 264)
He is a bit <u>less</u> (unapproachable); he is more
amenable to <u>talk</u>.

(70) /<u>yo</u> copol vinik/
He is a <u>miserable</u> bad man.

The sorting procedure when applied to this set of words

produced the following clusters, each justified as indicated.

(a) /sovra/   leftover, worthless
    /sonso/   stupid
    /copol/   bad, defective
    /bol/   stupid
    /cic/   stupid, foolish
'Such a person has served for nothing. He just is
totally useless.'

(b) /xilim/   imprudent, wild-talking
    /vov/   mad
    /loko/   crazy
    /cuvah/   mad, insane
'Such a person will just say (or do) anything. He
just says crazy things.'

(c) /bal/%[6]   satisfactory, adequate
    /c'ul/%[6]   holy
    /vaxal/   good, quiet, good-hearted
    /tuk'/   straight, honest, upright
    /lek/   good
'Such a person is good; he acts the way a good man does,
and serves (cargos). He knows the proper way to do things.
He is harmless when drunk.'

(d) /p'ih/   smart
    /bivo/%[6]   quick, lively, clever
'This person is good; he talks wisely. He knows where
he is going, what he is talking about, how he should
conduct himself.'

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[6]

Words marked with % have not appeared in the list above.

(e) /yan/ (/yan x7elan/)   disgusting
/mu/   disgusting
'Such a person is bad, is a good for nothing. He is
just disgusting and unpleasant.'

(f) /tuz/   homosexual
/yo/   wretched, lowly
/povre/   poor, unfortunate
/me7on/   orphaned, poverty-stricken
/c'ah/   lazy
/7abol -ba/   unfortunate, suffering
'This sort of person is probably just worthless. He
doesn't even pass cargos; he is just there, doing
nothing. He might be a homosexual, or lazy, or just a
lowly poor man.'

(g) /pukuh/   evil-tempered
/yihil/   disgusting
'/s(yih)il pukuhil no7ox/: it's just a matter of
(such a person's) disgusting evilness.'

(h) /pim/   stubborn
/porkirya/   disgusting
/manya/   wicked, mischievous
/penteho/   stupid, awful
'This person is awful. He won't do what he is told,
but what he does is wicked; perhaps he lies all the time,
or steals.'

(i) /c'inin/   itchy, licentious
/puta/%   whorish, licentious
'This is for sex-crazed women.'

These clusters suggest a highly tentative diagram which
opposes negative to positive characteristics. Predictably,
more common words in gossip deal with negatively evaluated
character traits than with positively evaluated ones.

Figure 10:

	Negative	Positive	
b	imprudent	wise	d
a	stupid	clever	
a	useless	serves cargos etc.	c
g	evil-tempered	good tempered	

Figure 10: (continued)

	Negative	Positive
f	poor	(wealthy)
	perverted	
e	disgusting	
h	wicked	(obedient)
	perverse	(law-abiding)
i	sexually improper	(modest, proper)

The clusters on which this diagram is based are far from
adequately justified.[7] Still one can draw certain obvious con-
clusions about the dimensions along which Zinacantecos are
commonly evaluated in gossip. The wise man who knows what he
is about, knows how to talk, and so forth, is contrasted with
both the wildly talking man who is overly loquacious and the
stupid, incapable man. Success in various public and reli-
gious offices stands in marked contrast to the 'worthless, left-
over' man. Good-temper contrasts with ill-temper. Poverty is
linked to laziness, which is linked to unmanliness. Finally,
this segment of vocabulary suggests that some people are sub-
ject to evil tendencies which lead them to wrongdoing, and
that some women have uncontrollable sexual desires. Gossip
about actual behavior ordinarily confronts no such marked
contrasts or absolute properties; but the language of gossip

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[7]
 Many kinds of eliciting tasks could add further structure to
this set of words which I never attempted in the field. For
example, I could have asked informants to arrange words according
to more complicated semantic relations (into antonymic pairs, for
example); instead the clusters of words represent likely coinci-
dences of characteristics in single people or types of people.

is a code which trades on extreme words to communicate a reality
[8]
in between.

Another important class of adjectives contains 'adverb-
ial' words which modify the main verbs of Tzotzil sentences.
Several of the words in the previous list of adjectives
function this way; for example, we may say

    (71) /pukuh xlo7ilah/ (E 248)
        He talks in an unfriendly unpleasant way.

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[8]
 Note that, though in the diagram several areas are indicated
in which no adjectival words occur (e.g., there is no word
meaning 'law-abiding', no adjective meaning 'wealthy') these
gaps are often filled by nominal constructions (/hk'uleh/
('wealthy man')), or by verbal constructions (/xc'un mantal/
('obeys orders')). How to bring these syntactically unlike
units together into a semantically coherent domain is an
operational problem with no obvious solution. One could
easily ask informants to sort whole phrases (rather than
single words, whether they be adjectives, nouns, verbs, etc.).
I chose to work with units which contrasted readily on
syntactic grounds --- roots whose derivational patterns
allowed them to be classed together. Working with larger
units might make reconciliation between semantic and syntactic
facts difficult.
    Note further that the gaps in the diagram indicate
that gossip commonly talks only about a few evaluable pro-
perties of its subjects. The paradigm is not defective:
the language can describe much about people that is hardly
worth saying.

Similarly, sentences (49) and (55) show /tuk'/ and /xilim/ used adverbially. Aside from such uses of otherwise semantically loaded words there are adverbials which seem primarily to be intensifiers or semantically neutral pointers. The following list contains the most frequent of such words in the gossip I collected.

/7animal/: $'lots of, very much'
Used to modify nouns, verbs, and adjectives.

    (72) /7animal sa7 smul/ (P 154)
        He gets into trouble all the time.

    (73) /toh 7animal la pukuh 7animal x7ilin tahmek li
        me7ele/ (P 340)
        They say that the old lady is just terribly shrewish,
        that she is always getting angry.

    (74) /7animal smanya 7uk/ (P 395)
        He, too, has lots of evil tendencies.

/baz'i/: $'very, real'
With adjectives and verbs this word is ordinarily an
intensifier.[9]

    (75) /baz'i ixi7/ (P 131)
        He was really afraid.

    (76) /yec sbaz'i-nop/ (P 241)
        He was just completely lying.

/ben/: 'good, very'

    (77) /baz'i ben c'ahot/ (G 3)
        You are just awfully lazy.

    (78) /ben xa vinik yilel pero stak'in la 7anz/ (P 364)
        He seems now to be a good man, but it is really
        woman's money (that he uses), they say.

9

 E. Z. Vogt (personal communication) suggests that /baz'i/
when used to modify nouns points to the most culturally
salient or oldest referents of a noun. Hence /baz'i k'op/
('real talk') refers to Tzotzil language; /baz'i vob/ ('real
music') refers to traditional as opposed to ladino music (and
to the corresponding instruments); and, e.g., /baz'i moral/
('real shoulder bag') refers to an old type of woven bag which
has been replaced in recent times by leather shoulder bags.

/7entero/: $'very, real, exactly, really, completely'

    (79) /mu 7onox baz'i 7entero tahmek sk'opon sbaik/ (E 330)
        They still don't really get along.

    (80) /lek 7entero vinik/ (E 396)
        He is a real man.

/labal/: 'completely, continuously, simply, constantly'
    This word most frequently modifies de-verbal nouns.

    (81) /ta7lo li labal k'abtael/ (P 206)
        I've had enough of being pissed on all the time
        (wife complaining about her ageing husband.)

    (82) /labal 7elek' zpas/ (E 424)
        He just steals constantly.

    (83) /mu hk'antikotik k'u slabal-7al tahmek/ (P 403)
        We don't like the things he keeps saying.

/lek/: 'well, successfully, excessively'
    As we saw above, when used with nouns /lek/ means simply
    'good'; with verbs it means 'be good at...'; with verbs
    referring to bad activities it means 'do to excess'.
    With adjectives, /lek/ is another intensifier.

    (84) /lek xa spasoh k'op/ (P 152)
        They are deeply involved in this dispute.

    (85) /lek iyic' 7arsyal/ (P 449)
        She was well whipped.

    (86) /lek hyakubel vinik/ (E 186)
        He is quite a drunkard.

    (87) /lek me bosol yu7un tahmek/ (H 80)
        It (pubic area) really bulges nicely on her.

/naka/: $'just, only, nothing but, simply, hardly'

    (88) /naka 7onox pistola sna7 7onox li h7a7yele/ (P 154)
        That guy has always had the custom of carrying
        a pistol.

    (89) /naka xa zvokol xci7iltak isk'anbe shol li
        tak'ine/ (P 262)
        When he asks for interest on loans (he just
        capitalizes on) the work of his comrades.

    (90) /naka me yak'bel, naka me taluk krixcano/ (O 14)
        Just hurry up and give it to her (fuck her); people
        might come along.

/solel/: $'just, simply'

(91) /solel yiluk yil li kahnile, solel batuk ta hmoh/
(P 177)
I'll simply forget about my wife; let her just
go for good.

(92) /mu k'u cismanbe, solel yec nox tahmek/ (P 250)
He doesn't buy me anything, he's just good for
nothing.

/toh/: 'so much, too much, very, just'
This word occurs quite frequently in gossip, and
ordinarily signals a quality that a person displays
to excess.

(93) /mu sna7 ta yo7on yec, toh pukuh, mu stak'
k'oponel/ (P 264)
He isn't well disposed to that; instead he is
terribly nasty. One can't talk to him.

(94) /toh palta shol/ (P 441)
He has too faulty a head (doesn't behave properly).

(95) /toh mas cilbahin parahel/ (P 222)
He mismanaged the affairs of the paraje too much.

/to(yo)l/: 'very, highly, often'
/Toyol/ literally means 'high' or 'tall'; its shortened
form /tol/ occurs as an intensifier.

(96) /baz'i tol ck'elvan, tol sokanbe shol viniketik/ (H 25)
She just always looks at people, she often seduces men.

(97) /tol stih yak'-camel/ (P 200)
He is always threatening witchcraft.

/yalal/: 'on purpose'
Laughlin (n.d.) lists this word as a 'particle'; it,
like most of the other words we have given in this class,
modifies the main verb of a sentence. It implies intent,
and thus parcels out blame.

(98) /mu yalaluk isk'opone/ (H 33)
He didn't speak to her on purpose.

(99) /yalal sa7bil yu7un/ (O 10)

/yec/ appears in many idiomatic constructions. With
verbs it often means 'do it for nothing, for no reason'.
It also means 'true'. When used in the subjunctive,
/ti yecuke/ ('if it were thus') often implies: this is
how it should have been, or how it would have been had
not something else occurred.

(100) /solel yec xkapet/ (O 18)
     He's just irritable for no reason.

(101) /muk' bu xkil ti yec cispasbe/ (O 10)
     I have never seen him treat me that way.

(102) /yec tal avak' avokol/ (H 45)
     You took the trouble to come all for nothing.

(103) /puhbeik smoton ti yecuke/ (P 42)
     They would have hit him with a gift (a punch)
     if it had been the way it should have been.

(104) /7ati tuk'uk batuke yu7van 7u k'usi smul ti
     yecuke/ (O 10)
     If he had gone directly, you can't mean to say
     that he would have been at fault.

In sorting these words my informant made only two groups.

The first contained the words /lek/, /7entero/, and /ben/.

He explained:

     This is a good man. He is /lek vinik/ ('good man'),
     /ben vinik/ ('good man'), /7entero vinik/ ('a real man.')

The second group contained all the other intensifiers and

particles. My informant urged:

     Think of a drunkard. One could say all these things
     about a man who drinks.

     /yec hyakubel skotol k'ak'al/
     He's just drunk all the time.

     /tol xyakub/
     He gets drunk a lot.

     /toh 7uc'el yu7un/
     He drinks too much.

/ksolel hyakubel/
He's simply a drunk.

/naka yakubel zpas/
All he does is get drunk.

/mero hyakubel/
He's a real drunk.

/labal yakubel zpas/
He is continually drunk.

and so forth.

This sorting tends to confirm my suspicion that in gossip intensifiers occur mostly as markers which point to negatively evaluated behavior or propensities. Such words in Tzotzil punctuate and italicize the spoken word.

Noun Roots

The largest class of roots in Tzotzil, and perhaps the only open class, is that of Nouns. The most interesting uses of nouns in gossip involve: (a) characterization of individuals by nouns naming identities, roles, social positions, etc.; (b) talk about emotions, motives, and personal capabilities through 'metaphorical' use of body part nouns; and (c) descriptions of disputes and evaluations of particular settlements.

From the most commonly occurring nouns from gossip, my informant produced the following clusters, which suggest types of people, roles, or identities.

(a) /mucaco/   boy, helper
    /7ulo7/   friend, visitor (reciprocal address term between Zinacantecos and Chamulas).

    /7intyo/   Indian, (impolite term)

Exegesis: 'These people are Indians; they serve more as helpers, hired hands --- especially Chamulas.'

(105) /spas ta smucaco yahval balamil/ (P 438)
  He became a servant of the Earth Lord.

(106) /srasyon 7intyoetik/ (H 46)
  That is the way Indians do it.

(107)/toh mas h7o7lol 7intyoetik li7toe/ (H 79)
  Some of the Indians around here are too much!

(b) /-cuhil/ $runt; fool, feeble-minded
    /mat/   Mateo: name of a town fool
                             in /Nabencauk/
    /palta/   fault, defect, failure
Exegesis: 'Such a man has a defective head; he is feeble minded (like Mat Valik).'

(108) /toh palta shol/ (P 441)
  He has a faulty head (i.e., is a fool).
(109) /ta byernexetik mu stak' mas hpastik palta/ (P 202)
  During Lent we must not fail in our duty.

(110) /xcuhil no7ox/
  He's just a moron.

(c) /h7elek'/   thief
    /7elav/   diversion
    /patil/   back, backside
Exegesis: 'This man offers diversion, because he is a thief. He comes from behind and steals; he sneaks around behind people's backs.'

(111) /cispak'ta ta 7elek' hci7uk kahnil/ (O 18)
  She falsely accuses my wife and me of being thieves.

(112) /ta patil cut sbaik/ (G 3)
  They scolded each other where we couldn't see them.

(d) /totil/ $father; senior
    /7ahvalil/ $lord, master; capable person,
                             owner
    /rason/   reason, wisdom, reasonableness
    /balamil/   land, property
Exegesis: 'This is a senior man who is wise; he is owner of
much land.'